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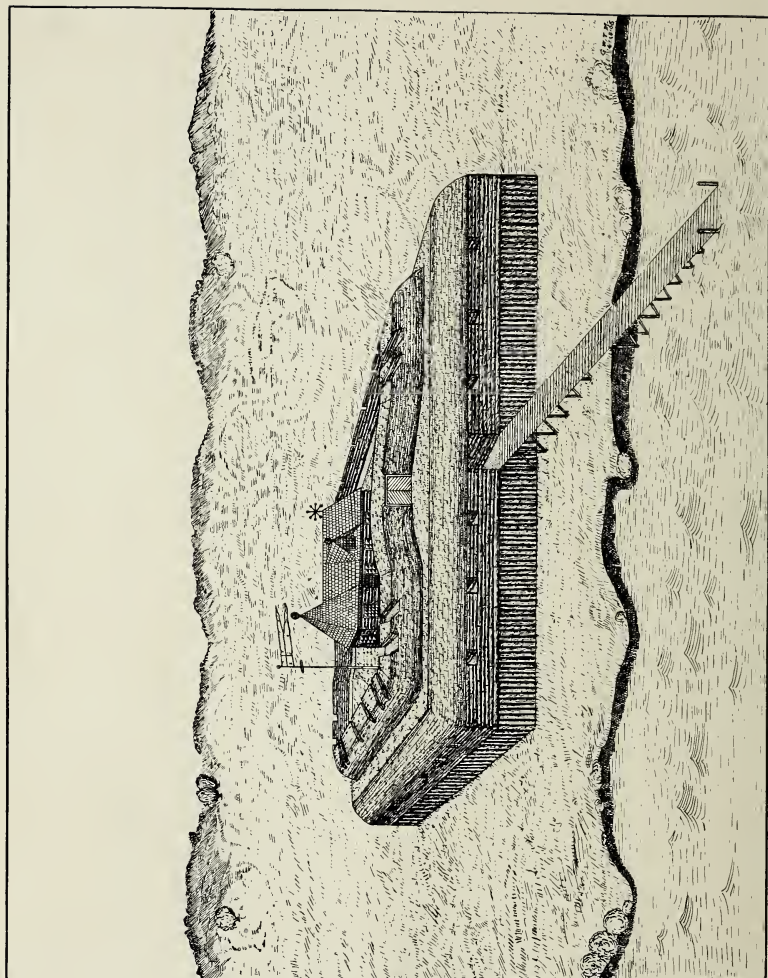




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FORT CASIMIR.



PAPERS OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF DELAWARE.

XLIII.

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# FORT CASIMIR.

THE STARTING POINT IN THE HISTORY OF NEW  
CASTLE, IN THE STATE OF DELAWARE.

ITS LOCATION AND HISTORY,

1651-1671.

BY

ALEXANDER B. COOPER, Esq.

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“Writers are the main landmarks of the past.”—*Bulwer.*

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*Read before the Historical Society of Delaware, Feb. 20, 1905.*

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THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF DELAWARE,  
WILMINGTON,  
1905.

THE JOHN M. ROGERS PRESS, WILMINGTON, DEL.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

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*Mr. President, and Members of the Historical Society of Delaware:*

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:—The paper which I shall read this evening, and which has been prepared with much labor and care, I have entitled, "Fort Casimir. The Starting Point in the History of New Castle, in the State of Delaware. Its Location and History. 1651-1671."

For convenience I have divided it into two parts. Part I, Relates more particularly to the location of the fort, and matters, incidental thereto. Part II, Relates exclusively to its brief, yet eventful history.

If its reading should prove as interesting to the hearer, as its preparation has been to the reader, he will feel more than compensated for his labor.



# “FORT CASIMIR.”

1651-1671.

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## PART I.

There is some historical mention, which might lead one inadvertently to believe, (considering the apparently authoritative source from which it comes), that there had existed for some twenty years prior to the erection of Fort Casimir by the Dutch, a Swedish town, at or near its site, called “Stockholm.” Mr. John F. Watson, the well known historian, in his exceedingly interesting and accredited work entitled “Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania in the Olden Time,” at page 8, Volume 1, states: “The Swedes claim our notice from and after the year 1631, as the time of their arrival assigned by their historian, Campanius. At that time they laid out the present New Castle, under the name of ‘Stockholm.’” Again on the same page he says, “the numerous forts, as called under the Government of the Swedes, very probably, often mere block-houses, indicate the state of their apprehension from enemies. Whether their Dutch neighbors, (at New Amsterdam, now New York) gave significant signs of intentions eventually to supplant them, is not now so obvious; but it is a matter of record that the Dutch, as early as 1651 built Fort Casimir, and called the place, ‘Nieu Amstel’ at the present New Castle. As it had before been a Swedish town under the name of ‘Stockholm,’ the Swedish Governor Printz, did what he

could to prevent it by solemn protest". Beyond such general statements, the writer has been unable after a thorough and careful search, to find anything to corroborate or sustain such a contention. If such a town ever did exist, beyond the fertile imagination of Campanius, (a most inaccurate and fanciful writer) it must have been very short-lived, small and insignificant, as nothing more is known or said of it.

"Stockholm" seems to have been built, solely in the imagination of Campanius, "the Scandinavian Munnchausen of Delaware," who took more delight in weaving and publishing fabulous stories of the "Sea Spiders" (King Crabs) here, that had tails "half an ell long, and made like a three-edged saw, with which the hardest tree may be sawed down," or of the rattle snakes with heads "like that of a dog, and can bite off a man's leg as clear as if it had been hewn down with an ax," etc., than in recording veritable history.

The Swedes had undoubtedly laid claim to all that part of the territory and may have designated it (as some have asserted) under or by the general name of "Stockholm", after the capital of their country. Be this as it may, both by authentic history and by the best tradition it is now universally conceded that the building of Fort Casimir was the starting point in the history of the present city of New Castle.

This old fort, while well suited for the purposes of its day, was a small structure, undoubtedly built of wood,—for as will hereafter be seen it began to go into decay within a few years from its erection and was a total wreck and thing of the past within twenty years therefrom. It was built in the year 1651 sometime subsequent to May 25th, presumably

during the early summer, by Petrus Stuyvesant "the Dutch Director-General of the whole of the New Netherland," which included the territory of Delaware. This most unique and interesting character was born in Holland. He served in the West Indies, was director of Curacoa and lost a leg in an attack on the Portuguese Island of St. Martin, when he returned to his native country. During his subsequent life he wore an artificial wooden leg "bound with sterling silver bands".

Washington Irving in his humorous history of New York, dubbed him "Peter the Headstrong," and characterized him as a "tough, sturdy, valiant, weather-beaten, mettlesome, obstinate, lion-hearted, generous-spirited old Governor, ever ready to draw the sword." He was surely a man of many sterling qualities and good parts. His remains now lie buried in a vault built for the purpose, under St. Mark's Church at Tenth street and Second avenue, in the City of New York. In response to an inquiry, the Reverend L. W. Batten, D. D., Rector of the Church, kindly wrote the writer of this article under the date of May 9th, 1903, "Petrus Stuyvesant's vault lies under the present church. There was a stone tablet, oblong, in the wall of the church containing this inscription:

'In this vault lies buried Petrus Stuyvesant, late Captain-General and Governor-in-Chief of Amsterdam in New Netherland now called New York, and the Dutch West India Islands, died in A. D. 1671-2, aged 80 years.'" Mr. Batten then goes on to say, "about two years ago the Stuyvesant family put up a new blue stone tablet, of the same size and shape as the old one. The inscription is the same, save unhappily the date is simply 1672." Yes unhappily! It is to



be regretted and deplored, that in the renovating of old monuments and tombstones the tendency now-a-days is to change and modernize them. Good taste as well as accuracy demands that there should be no change. Not the slightest. If the exact date of an event is not known, it is misleading to give one. But to return. Stuyvesant first arrived at New Amsterdam (N. Y.) on May 27th, 1647. He at once assumed official authority over the whole of New Netherland and began preparations which he intended should result in more effectually strengthening his Government. He established Courts of Justice there and ordered a general election of 18 delegates, who in turn selected 9 of their number as the Governor's Advisory Council. He adopted a policy and spirit of amity and conciliation with the Indians along the North (now Hudson) river, whom his predecessor William Kieft, had by his lack of judgment and offensiveness incited to malignant hostility. Under very severe penalties and forfeitures, he prohibited and practically stopped, the further sale of intoxicating liquors and fire-arms to them. He prescribed and enforced a rigid observance of Sunday, erected a better class of houses and taverns, founded public schools and established public squares, markets and annual fairs for the people,—thus inspiring new life and vigor into that portion of the colony,—and they progressed rapidly. Having accomplished so much at New Amsterdam, he turned his attention to the claims and interests of the Dutch on the South (now Delaware) River, particularly that portion of the territory lying and being on its western shore. The previous difficulties and contests with the Swedes at Fort Christina (Wilmington) as their central government, caused him much anxiety and apprehension, as



they were constantly gaining strength. He feared that any efforts of a conciliatory character would be fruitless as the bitterness of feeling between them had grown very great. He considered the situation well, and finally concluded that there was but one way to reach them and establish the claims of the Dutch to that side of the River. This was by force and arms, if they did not at once and without unnecessary parley submit. With this determination he came over from New Amsterdam to the Dutch Fort Nassau (near Gloucester, N. J.) and from this point communicated with Governor Printz (the Swedish Director) soliciting a personal interview with him. This Governor Printz readily granted, and they met in conference on or about the 25th day of May, 1651. Printz fully and minutely set forth the claim of the Swedes to the territory in dispute, particularly that part lying south of the Christiana River (then called Minqua Creek).

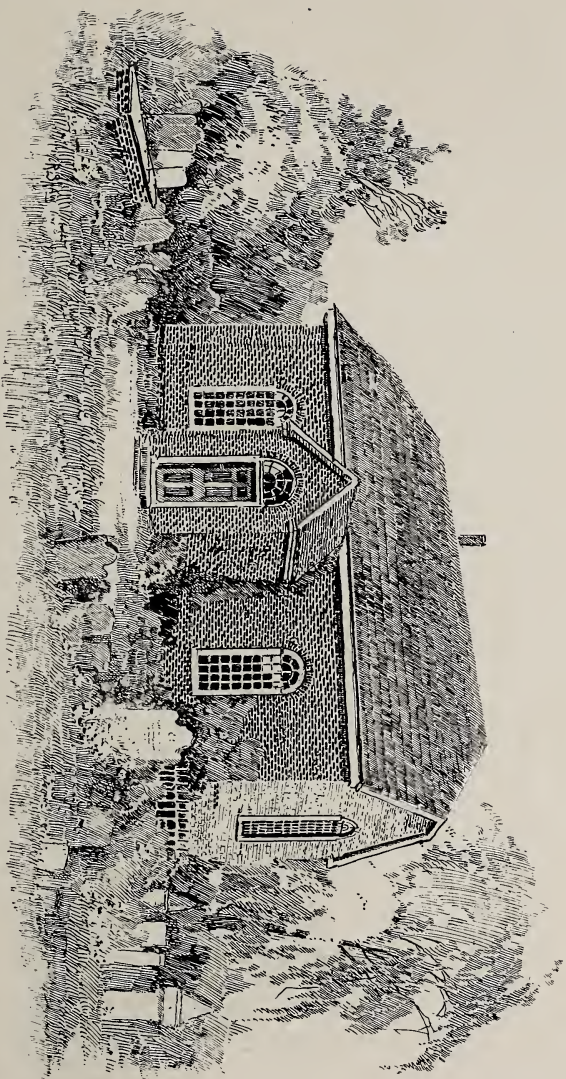
He at first absolutely refused to relinquish any part of it, but finally said that if he did "his people demanded some substantial tribute." Stuyvesant was not that kind of a man, nor was he there for any such purpose. He defiantly and in angry tones refused any such proposition, and said that he "would neither admit nor submit to any of the claims of the Swedes." Printz was fully conscious of and realized the power of Stuyvesant and the Dutch Government at New Amsterdam, as well as his own weakness to contest with them. He was anxious to come to some terms before they separated. He feared lest in the end Fort Christina might be taken from him. Finally "after much discussion and altercation," he entered into a treaty, whereby "all of the lands which had been originally ceded to the Dutch by the Indians in 1633 were again ceded to Stuyvesant

by him." This cession in extent included all the lands and territory lying between the present Christiana River on the North, and Bombay Hook on the South. This territory, it is superfluous to say, embraces within its bounds that point of land (in olden times variously called "Grape Vine Point," "Sandhuken," &c.), which extends into the Delaware River, and upon which Fort Casimir was built and the City of New Castle now stands.

This is one of the most beautiful points of land in its natural surroundings on the bay and river, and from the high and fast character of the land,—with large marshes on either side,—well suited for the purpose of erecting fortifications for the defense of the early settlers in that vicinity. Under the treaty of Printz and Stuyvesant, the Swedes retained Fort Christina and the land occupied by them north of the Christiana River.

The precise date of this sudden and peculiar treaty and submission of Printz is unknown, but was presumably (as nothing is said to the contrary) on the day of the first meeting,—which appears to have been May 25th. Historians have also failed to find any reasonable motive to warrant such action on the part of Printz, unless he was induced by "some substantial tribute." Immediately after the treaty and cession were concluded, Stuyvesant abandoned Fort Nassau, came down the river, took possession of the new territory and erected Fort Casimir.

This was the first structure built in the present City of New Castle. The actual building of it could not have occupied much time. It can therefore be stated with almost absolute certainty, that it was built in the early summer of 1651. Presumably in June. Following his desire and



THE ORIGINAL IMMANUEL CHURCH,  
NEW CASTLE,  
BUILT ABOUT 1700.



intention to improve the colony here, as he had already done in New Amsterdam, Stuyvesant began at once to encourage the immigration of his countrymen, the erection of buildings, wind mills to grind flour, laying out of the town, and its general improvement, by establishing markets, fairs, etc., as he had done at New Amsterdam. In a very short time there were at least twenty-six Dutch families added to the settlement. Buildings were erected and streets laid out. In the centre of New Castle, there is now a large square or tract of land, occupied principally by the old Court House and County Jail (the courts having been removed to Wilmington in 1881), Immanuel P. E. Church, and the public school buildings. Prior to the erection of these buildings, it was a vacant or common public square and used for public purposes,—markets, fairs, etc., from the time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary. Is it not a reasonable suggestion to make, that this square was laid out and appropriated to the public uses and for the public purposes of the inhabitants of the town by Petrus Stuyvesant, the acknowledged patron of markets and fairs in New Amsterdam (now New York)? The particular purposes for which it has been used in modern times, were created by an act of the General Assembly, of the freemen of the counties of New Castle, Kent and Sussex upon the Delaware, and the Province of Pennsylvania, passed on June 13, 1772. The old State House, gaol and county buildings, as also the Immanuel Church and the old Market House, which were all built prior to the time of the passage of this act, seem to have been erected upon the square, without any claim of title or authority, other than the common consent and acquiescence of the inhabitants of the town, as being



in the interest and for the use of the public. The title and the various preambles of the act sufficiently disclose this. It is entitled "An Act for Vesting the State House and Other Buildings with the lot of ground whereon the same are erected, together with other ground, situated in the town of New Castle, in trustees for the uses therein particularly mentioned." Each section has a preamble. The first preamble recites, "Whereas the lot of land, situate in the square, called the Market Square, in the center of the town of New Castle, and contained within the bounds following:" (a portion of the square is then described by metes and bounds) "hath at all times been considered, taken and held as ground dedicated to the use of the public, and accordingly a State House, gaol and other buildings, have been erected thereon at the charge of the County of New Castle," etc. It is then enacted, that the title be vested in Thomas McKean, George Read, John McKinly, Alexander Porter, George Monro, John Evans and David Thompson, gentlemen, and the survivors and survivor of them in fee simple, upon the proper and suitable trusts therein named. The same preamble and provision are made with reference to Immanuel Church (which occupied another part of the square), and Aeneas Ross, Richard McWilliams and Joseph Tatlow were created trustees, upon appropriate trusts. The title to the northerly corner of the square, under a similar preamble, stating that "the inhabitants of the said town intend to erect a school house thereon, and are desirous of having the same appropriated and applied to that use," was vested in fee in David Finney, John Thompson, George Read, Thomas McKean and George Monro, "in trust nevertheless for the erecting a school house or school houses

thereon, and to be for that use forever." The preamble to the fifth section of the act recites, "And whereas the remaining part of the aforesaid market square, hath at all times been considered, taken and held as ground belonging to the inhabitants of the said town of New Castle for the holding of fairs, markets and other public uses, and a market house hath accordingly been erected thereon at the charge of the said inhabitants." It is then enacted that the title thereto be vested in David Finney, John Thompson, George Read, Thomas McKean and George Monro, in trust "for the use of the inhabitants of the said town of New Castle forever." At that date the entire market square was bounded by the present Delaware, Orange and Harmony streets, and the roadway on the southeasterly side of the present Market street. The old market house stood on the plot of land where the town hall is now situated.

The present town hall stands on the exact site of the first market house, and was built in 1820. The roadway on the northwesterly side of Market street, was probably opened through the square, so as to afford more easy and convenient access to the State House, gaol, Immanuel Church and to the northwesterly side of the market house.

The main purpose of this interesting digression, is to show that it is more than probable, as before stated, that market square was a design of, and was originally laid out and dedicated to the inhabitants of New Amstel (as it was then called), for the public use and enjoyment, by Petrus Stuyvesant, the builder of Fort Casimir, and as such the veteran pioneer of New Castle. William Penn had nothing whatever to do with the laying out of this square as some have erroneously supposed. The precise spot upon which Fort

Casimir stood, is a little obscure, although the boundaries of the lot whereon it was erected are certain. The writer for a long time thought that it was located on Front street between Harmony and Chestnut streets,—everything seemed to so point—but after a more careful examination, he has very recently found an old survey and plot which has forced him to change his opinion. There is sufficient information to be gathered not only from general writers of the State's history, but from the public records and documents still in existence here and in Albany (N. Y.), to conclusively show: First, that it was on the northeasterly side of the town. Second, that it was on the river front or "Strand,"—as it was then called. Third, that it went into decay and ruin, and was abandoned about 1670 or 1671. Fourth, that it was the only fort built by the Dutch at New Castle. Fifth, that in 1670 or 1671, while the English were in possession and after its destruction, a block house (to take its place for purposes of defence) was ordered and built farther in and towards the west of the town. This block-house was built at or near the site of Immanuel Church. Sixth, that in 1675 the people wanted this last block house moved to a more central part of the town, where they could also have a court house and prison,—and it was so moved to a point at or near where the old court house now stands, at the southeasterly end thereof, where the first permanent and substantial court house was erected. The other parts of the present building have been erected since. The main building about 1708. The first small wing on the northeast side in 1765. It was torn down and the present larger wing erected in 1845. Mr. Joseph H. Rogers, now in his 88th year, and a prominent and respected resident of New Castle, who, through



himself, his father and grandfather has kept in touch with the events of the city for at least one hundred and fifty years, recently told the writer of this paper, that it has always been understood, that the bell which now hangs in the belfry of the old court house, was presented in some way, by Queen Anne of England. Possibly from her "Bounty." The proof of these several assertions or statements of the writer is derived from various sources, a list of which is appended to this paper, but it is only necessary to refer, principally, to some of the existing records and universally conceded facts. With some few exceptions (isolated houses) the main part of the town laid along the "strand," or what is now Front or Water street, in a southwesterly direction from the fort and around or near the Market Square.

The fort was called "Fort Casimir," by the Dutch,—after John Casimir, Prince Palatinate of the Rhine,—"Fort Trinity," while the Swedes occupied it, (it having been captured on Trinity Sunday), and "Fort Amstel," by the Dutch, when re-taken by them. Under the subsequent English rule the town was called New Castle, and has so remained to this day. There are numerous deeds of record in Wilmington, granting lots "South of the Fort." On February 9th, 1656, a lot was granted to Jacobus Crabbe, "below and adjacent to the Fort." In Deed Record A, page 1, is a land patent from Alexander D. Henyosa, etc., Governor of Delaware River, etc., to Gerrit Van Sweeringen, of a piece of meadow (or valley) and woodland lying "on the other side of the first marsh on the south of this Forte of New Amstel." This deed was signed and sealed "in the Forte of Nieuer Amstel this 3rd, July, 1664." This marsh was undoubtedly the marsh then in existence and through

which a creek or stream of water ran, on the land now owned by the railroad company at the "Battery." It is also stated by some writers, with apparent authority, that "Fort Casimir was located on the north of the present town, on a promontory of land, long ago washed away." There is no point of land in the city, which could more accurately answer this description to the writer's mind, than the high point of land now known as "Potter's Field," on the river shore, at the northerly end of the town. It is high fast land, although much of it since that day has been washed away by the river. Front or Water street, which ran in front of the Fort and in a southerly direction, is (at that point) now entirely obliterated. To the personal knowledge of the writer some 30 or 40 feet of the fast land (and perhaps more) has been swept away by the erosion of the tides within the last 40 years. Front or Water street was one of the early streets, which were required under the regulations of the town, "to be laid out on the south side of the Fort, four or five rods wide."

Among the public records of New Castle County, in Deed Record A, Volume 1, page 71, may now be found, the following record of an old land warrant. This record seems to have been heretofore unknown, and is now made public for the first time within the writer's knowledge. This warrant describes the boundaries of the lot on which the Fort stood,—together with an adjoining lot. It reads,—"By virtue of a warrant from the Court of New Castle bearing date the eighth day of November, 1678.

Laid out for Engelbert Lott, two lotts of Ground situated in the towne of New Castle and att the North East end thereof, one of which lotts being the same whereon the Old

Forte stood, the other being a lott formerly laid out for Hendrick Vander Burch, being bounded as followeth,—To the South West with the Highway or street which leadeth to the woods,—To the North East with the common, not yet taken up,—To the South East with ye street by ye water side,—To the North West by Land Street. Being long to the South West next the Highway 277 ft. to the north east 268 ft. being broad behind and before 220 feet, with express condition that the said Lott shall and will make even the Old Forte and have a sufficient street or Highway at the Water side laid out the 24th of May 1679.

was signed,

ED. CANTWELL."

Edmund Cantwell was the High Sheriff of the town, river and bay. Engelbert Lott, whose name has thus become prominent in history, was a shoemaker.

There is also an ancient survey made by Ephraim Herman, Surveyor, recorded in the Book of Surveys of New Castle County, at page 338, also apparently unknown, and of which the following is an exact copy, and its first publication:

"New Castle, Nov. 23, 1681, by virtue of an order of ye Court of New Castle bearing date ye 1, Nov. 1681. Laid out for Mr. Arnoldus D. Lagrange a vacant Peece of Land with a small Peece of Marsh to itt, granted by the court, for ye erecting a wind mill upon it, for ye common good of ye Inhabitants. Including in this survey a lot belonging to Rich. Kittle & sence purchased by ye said Lagrange and adjoyn that, granted him by the Court. The sd Land being scituate and lying att ye North East end of this towne of New Castle next to ye foott dyke, beginning att a stake

standing near ye said foott dyke and from thence S. W. along ye Dyke street leading toward Land street 598 foott to ye corner of the thwart street, by ye old fort, then N. N. W. along ye street or way wch goest over ye Great Dyke 400 foott to ye corner of a little ditch which parts this from a Peece of marsh belonging to Mr. Moll, then E. b. N. E. along ye sd Little ditch 240 foot & E & N. E. along ye same 250 foot to another stake standing near ye Creek from thence S. E. b. S. 88 foot to ye first mentioned stake. Surveyed by mee, EPH. HERMAN, Suvr."

This was called the "Wind-mill Lot", as it is endorsed on the said survey. Recorded with this survey is a draft or plot, which the writer has had copied, and annexed hereto for the purposes of this paper. It locates the lots of Engelbert Lott, upon which the fort stood, with absolute certainty. (See plot.)

There is also a record of the court in the Prothonotary's office, which reads as follows; "att a court held at New Castle the second May. 1682.

Granted to William Sempill the lot which was formerly granted to Hans Coderus and not yet improved.

Examined per J. A. CLAYPOOLE

& compared.

The lot is bounded to the Eastward by the Front street to the Westward by the Back street, to the Northward by the lott now belonging to the Right Hon'ble Proprietor & to the Southward by the lotts of Engelbert Lott, contains in breadth sixty foot and in length proportionably to the adjoining lotts. Surveyed to William Sempill & sold to Darcus Land, with the draught being lost and no patent yet granted."

In the Albany Records, it is noted that "Jacob Alrich's

farm north of the town (in 1660) was known as the "Bouwerie." Old residents of the town, now living, have told the writer that they well recollect, the "Bowerie Woods," on the North and Northwest side of the town. Alrich's farm was presumably named after Stuyvesant's home and farm at New Amsterdam, which was called by him the "Bowerie," and the name is still retained in the present "Bowery", of New York City.

From these several descriptions as they appear of record, the present boundaries of the Fort lot are fixed,—almost to a certainty. It was bounded on the N. W. by the present Market street (then Land St.), on the N. E. by (now, as then) unimproved lands, on the S. E. by Front or Water street, ("ye street by ye water side") on the S. W. by the lot of Engelbert Lott, on the N. E. corner of Chestnut and Market streets. Chestnut street was the first *cross* street leading up from the river at that end of the town.

All the *cross* streets at that time, were called "the thwart streets", and from this fact, the writer has found it sometimes difficult to locate many lots, bounded by "Thwart" street. The name had no reference to the Fort as many suppose.

The Thwart street in the survey, is however, unmistakably, the present Chestnut street, and was the street, which lead (by the way of the Great Dyke and the road to Wilmington) to the woods of Jacob Alrich.

Taking therefore, the description of Engelbert Lott's, two lots, as heretofore given and definitely shown by the survey, and allowing 100 feet for the then usual depth of building lots, on the N. E. side of Chestnut street, would make the Fort lot, begin on Front or Water street, (at its

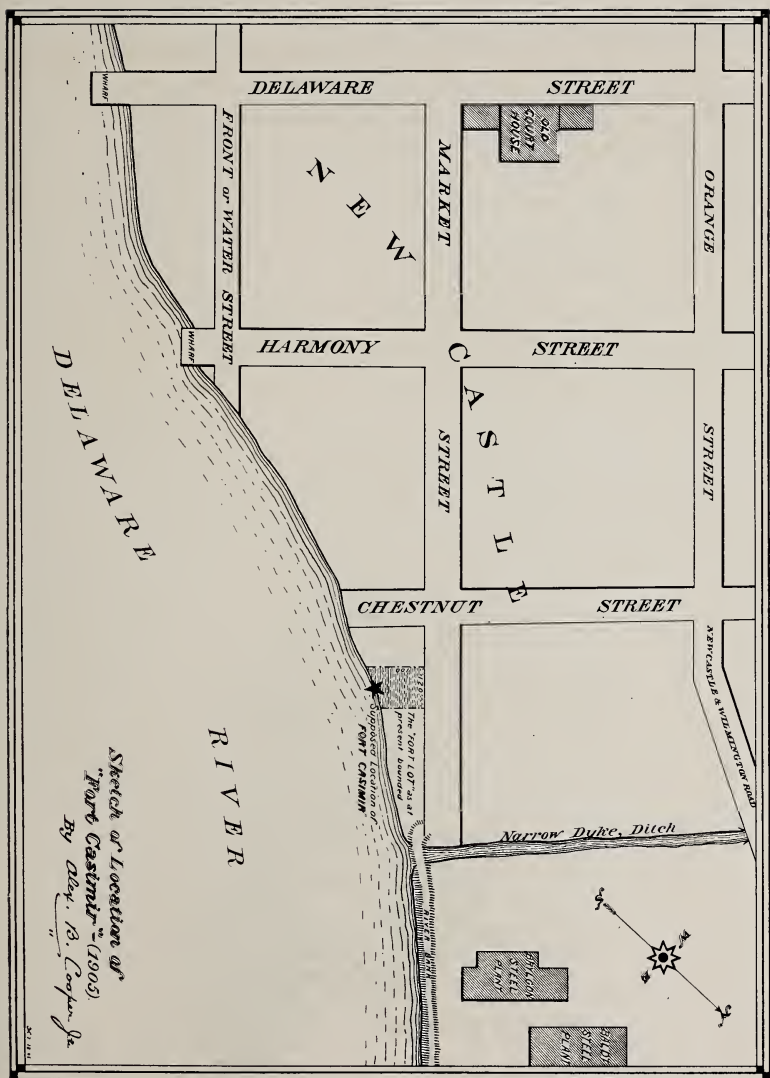


intersection with Chestnut street), at the distance of 100 feet N. E. from Chestnut street, thence extending 120 feet along Front or Water street, and extending back to Market street 268 feet. Front or Water street, at this point, has been (as stated) entirely washed away,—and also much of the fast land,—and it is not at all improbable, from the lay of the land now, that the precise spot of ground upon which the Fort stood has been submerged.

A few days ago the writer visited and carefully viewed the ground, and he estimates that at the point where the Fort stood (exclusive of the bed of Front or Water street), at least 150 feet of the fast land has been washed away since the Fort was built. Thus reducing the size of the lot from its original dimensions,—of about 120 feet on the Front or Water street, with a depth of 268 feet to Market street,—to about 120 feet on the river, and a depth of about 100 feet to Market street. Which still further strengthens his belief that most, if not all of the soil whereon the Fort stood is now buried beneath the ceaseless ebb and flow of the tide. (The accompanying sketch, shows its present location and boundary.)

There is much of great interest (particularly to one who lives in and loves the ancient town, its history and its people), surrounding this subject.

In Volume 12, "Documents Relating to the History of the Dutch and Swedes Settlements on the Delaware River," published by B. Fernow, Keeper of the Historical Records at Albany, N. Y., there appear many documents bearing upon this general subject. As early as May 15, 1660, William Beekman (Lieut. Gov.) wrote to Governor Stuyvesant then at New Amsterdam, that the Fort was in a







defenceless condition from the threatened attack by Lord Baltimore, saying,—“only a few musket and gun balls on hand here, and no balls or case shot whatever for the cannons”.

October 15th, 1670, it was thought by the High Court, consisting of John Carr, William Tom, H. Block, Israel Helme, Peter Rambo and Peter Kock, “that the market place, where the bell hangs, was the most convenient place in Newcastle to erect Block Houses for defensive purposes, and it was resolved to give the order accordingly, provided, that his Honor Captain Carr shall cede forever the necessary ground thereto without retaining any claim on it. As to expenses and labor required for the aforesaid fortifications and Block Houses, the citizens of New Castle are first to advance money, each according to his means and position, to pay the laborers, provided that inhabitants of this district able to do all such work shall be held to assist in the work, as occasion may require. As to the fortifications as above, the matter is left to the discretion of the people there, to choose the most convenient place or places for the defences. All however with the understanding, that if no war breaks out with the natives, which God may prevent, the said houses shall be used for the public service as council house, prison and other purposes, while they may be used as such by the whole river for a general and public account and expense.”

Pursuant to this, Captain Carr asked the Governor and council, “that a block house may be erected in some convenient place of ye town, where a constant whatch may be kept (now ye forte is fallen to ruin and decay) for the common defense, the wch will cost noe great Mattr and may be

risen at ye charge and expense of ye inhabitants of ye towne and plantation upon ye Rvr, who will not be backward (if any order shall be issued for it) in contributing towards the same." At a Council held in Fort James, New York, on June 14th, 1671, "the erecting of a block-house for common defense is approved."

This was undoubtedly the block-house which history and credible tradition say, was erected at or near the present Immanuel P. E. Church, and which some have confusedly considered as Fort Casimir, although it was not built, until 20 years after the building of Fort Casimir.

After this, numerous petitions and demands were made by the Magistrates of New Castle, to Governor Andros, for "making of a Court House" and prison. These it appears from the Albany Records began in the fall of 1675. There was some delay in their consideration. One reason assigned for the delay was because Mr. Moll, (one of the Magistrates) was absent, "being to go into Maryland".

At another Council held September 15, 1675, "ordered, that ye block-house at New Castle bee removed and built on ye back side of ye towne, about ye middle of it, at or near ye Old Block-House, wherein there may be a Court House and a Prison also". Under this order it seems apparent, that the Block-House near the Church was removed to, and a Court House built on the lot whereon the present Court House stands.

This was the first permanent Court House. It was a small building and stood on the South-Easterly end of the present building, where the sheriff's office was, before the removal of the County seat to Wilmington in 1881.

It is now occupied on the first floor, as the Mayor's Office

and by the City Council of New Castle, as a Council Chamber. On the upper floor (the old Grand Jury room), by "The New Castle Club," as a social club room.

The building of the prison under the order was still further delayed. The Governor was again petitioned, as follows:—"There being no prison for ye securing of debtors, fugitives and malefactors, who often make their escape for want of same, wee therefore desire your Honor's order, for the erecting of a prison, which we Immadgine would be convenient to stand in ye fort and that yr Honor will Lykewise p'scrybe what allowance prisoners shall have" etc.

At a Council held in New York November 20, 1676, it was ordered, "(4) Allowed that a prison bee built in ye fort and and the Sheriffe to bee responsible for prisoners."

Governor Andros in compliance with and in execution of this order, wrote to the Magistrates of New Castle, "(4) You may cause a prison to bee built in ye Fort and the Sheriffe is to bee responsible for prisoners."

This last Fort or Block-House built at that period of time, has long since disappeared, but the old Court House, with many subsequent additions, alterations and improvements, still stands to visibly mark the spot where the first substantial Court House was built in the year 1675 or 1676.

It may be noted here, that in 1798, Chief Justice George Read recommended building a jail, "with a stone wall around it, with a yard for the prisoners to exercise and breathe fresh air."

So that it may be said upon the authority of these records, by way of a brief recapitulation:—

1. That Fort Casimir was built in the year 1651, upon the lot described on Front or Water Street.

2. That it went into ruin and decay in 1671, and was abandoned by the building of a block-house at or near the site of the present Immanuel Church.

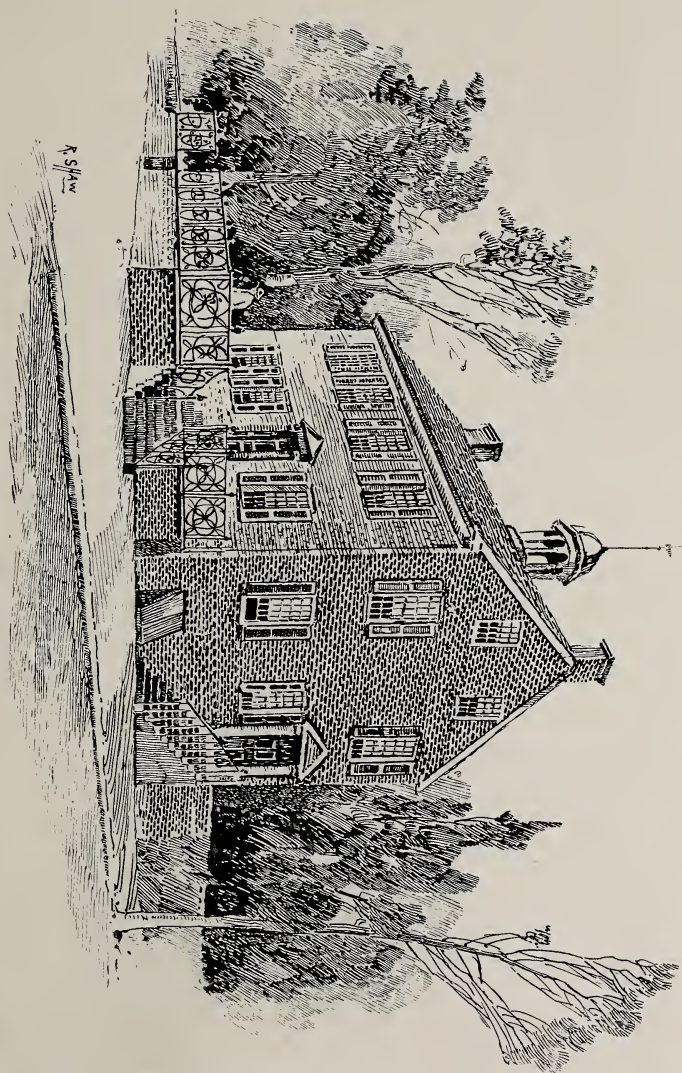
3. That this location, proving inconvenient, it was again removed in 1675 or 1676, and a new one built, with a Court House attached,—and afterwards a prison,—on the lot where the present Court House stands, and at the South-easterly end thereof.

This Court House was the identical one in which William Penn was “welcomed with joy,” and given the livery of seisin to the town and territory adjoining, on the 28th day of October, 1682. There can be no doubt of this, in the mind of anyone who has closely studied the true history of the events, which occurred at that time.

On September 22nd, 1676, it appears by the Albany Records, that Edmond Andros (Governor) ordered, that “the booke of laws Established by his Royal Highness, and practiced in New York, Long Island and Dependences bee likewise enforced and practiced in this river and precinct, etc.” The courts were to be held in New Castle once a month, and that “there be a High Sheriff for the town, river and bay.” It may not be out of place to here note, that there seems to have been another fort built in New Castle later on.

In Volume 1, page 129, of Scharf’s History of Delaware, it is recorded, that in 1706 at the secret suggestion of the Governor, the Assembly of the lower counties authorized the erection of a fort at New Castle for her Majesty’s service, on account of the war then raging between England, France and Spain. It was however not erected until the winter of 1707, by Captain Rednap, the Queen’s Engineer, who was brought from New York by the Governor for the





THE ORIGINAL COURT HOUSE,  
NEW CASTLE,  
BUILT ABOUT 1676.



purpose. This fort was built more particularly for the purpose of imposing a duty on all vessels passing the fort, in going up the river from the sea,—consisting of one quarter of a pound of powder per ton, for all vessels owned by persons residing on the Delaware river or bay, and a half of a pound for those owned by all others, excepting only ships of war,—etc. John French was the first commander of the fort. This fort it is said and it is generally believed was erected near the river at the foot of what was called “Fort Lane,” which was,—what would now be,—the river end of South street extended, on the southwest part of the town.

This was the last fort built in the town, (exclusive of the Earth-Works in 1812) and the last that is known of it, was in 1752, when it seems to have been demolished by the County authorities.

Mr. Rogers, (who has aided me by his valuable papers and reminiscences) has kindly permitted me to copy an item in an old bill in his possession as follows:—

“New Castle County,

To Geo. Monroe,

Dr.

Feby. 1752, To taking down the flag  
pole from the fortifications and setting in the  
street,

10'' (shillings)

## PART II.

To complete the full purpose of this writing, it is necessary to give a brief yet comprehensive outline of the history of Fort Casimir, during its continuance as such. Its usefulness as a fortification, practically ended with the ejection of the Swedes. Subsequent to that event it began to decay, and was only used for the miscellaneous and public purposes of the inhabitants of the town. Soon after its erection, Stuyvesant returned to New Amsterdam, with the full belief that the possessions of the Dutch in Delaware were permanent and secure. Von Poffenburg was left in command. Governor Printz protested to him, against the building of the fort, alleging that it was in violation of the treaty.

These protests were disregarded. The fort was armed and garrisoned. The Dutch rapidly increased their forces and supplies, so as to be ready in any emergency that might arise.

The Swedes looked upon and considered these preparations with alarm, and began to take active and vigorous measures for their protection. But suddenly and without assigning any reason therefore, Printz relaxed his aggressiveness and became a warm friend of Stuyvesant, and continued so until he (Printz) sailed for Sweden in 1653. Much interesting matter of detail, surrounds the history of these times and events, but it is sufficient for the purpose of this writing, to refer only in a general way to the more material and important facts. The Swedes again began to complain to (their Governor) Printz against the building of the fort, and under this pressure, Printz again issued a protest to Von Poffenburg,



the Commander,—warning him to leave, as no authority had been given by him to build it, and that it was within the Swedish jurisdiction. Von Poffenburg replied to these protests, saying that the land was “regularly and fairly purchased from the Indians,” that it was the land of the Dutch, and that he (Printz) had ceded it to them, and that they proposed to stay there. Then followed “a windy warfare between them.” No swords were drawn or blood spilt. These futile and unmeaning protests continued until Printz, realizing the position which he had unwittingly placed himself, left the country and went back to Sweden. He left his son-in-law John Pappegoya in charge at Fort Christina.

Rudman says, that Printz returned to Sweden suddenly and without reason, except, “weary of delay and apprehension of danger from the near vicinity of the Dutch, Fort Casimir being only five miles from Fort Christina, he went back to Sweden.” It is more than probable that his return was brought about from remorse, from his untimely, sudden, denounced and supposed treacherous treaty. His departure however was a severe blow to many of the Swedes. They keenly felt their strength weakening. They had no confidence in Pappegoya. The next year (1654) John Claude Risingh, “a Swede of large proportions”, who had been commissioned Governor of New Sweden in 1653, to take Printz’s place, sailed for the Delaware, and arrived at Fort Christina in the month of May of that year.

He brought with him instructions, to at once enlarge and extend the Swedish colony, without giving offense to the Dutch or English, “and rather suffer the Dutch to occupy said fortress” (Casimir), “than it should fall into the hands of the English, who are more powerful and of course most

dangerous in that country." Notwithstanding these instructions (feeling his ability to do so) he determined to seize Fort Casimir and drive the Dutch away. To this end he and John Amundson, who was with him as Military Commander, appeared before Fort Casimir, with their men. They "fired a royal salute," and dropped anchor on May 31, 1654. They at first determined to attack the Fort by a bold and unexpected strike and fight their way through as best they could. But they finally concluded to gain possession, if possible, by skill, artifice and stratagem. They landed near the Fort with about twenty to thirty men of their military retinue, under the immediate command of Captain Swenso. They viewed the Fort and its surroundings, and saw at a glance the incompetency and inefficiency of the garrison opposed to them.

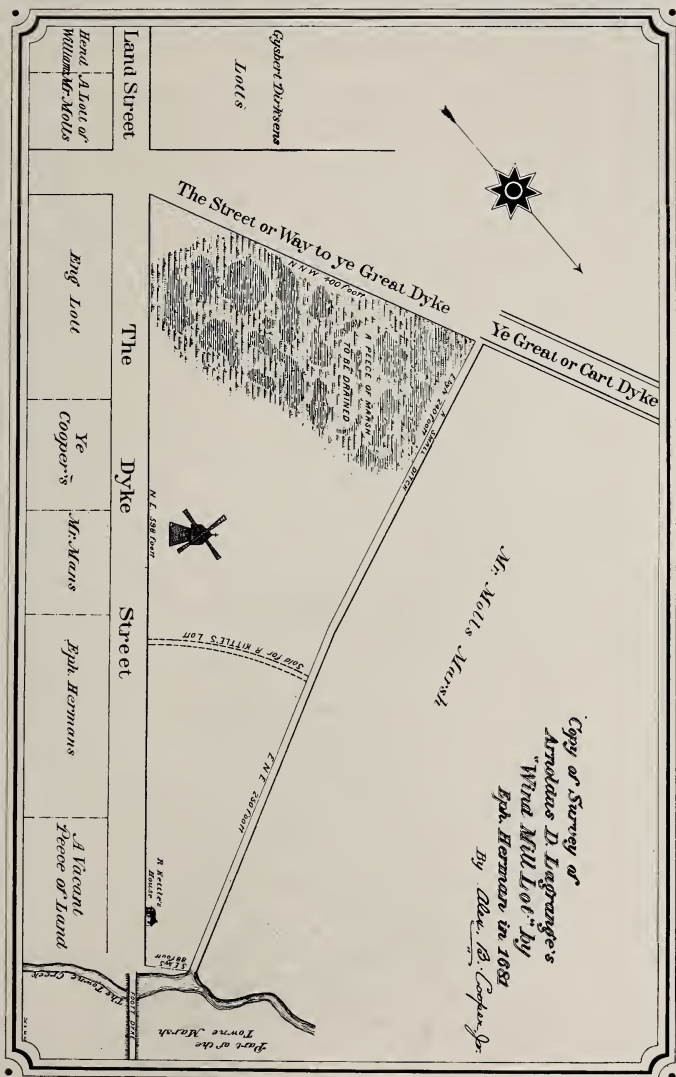
The Military commander of the Fort was Gerrit Bikker. He was a man of "great weakness and timidity," and instantly became much alarmed. Through his great fear and trepidation, it is recorded by some writers, "he submitted to the Swedish authority of Captain Swenso and his twenty men, who had been sent ashore, and permitted them to enter and take possession of the Fort." Others say, and their account seems more in accord with the truth, "that the controlling cause of the surrender, was the fact that Risingh and those under him, had basely pretended that the Dutch West India Company had authorized it,"—and that Risingh had been commissioned by the Company to take possession of the Fort and occupy it. Acrelius says, the Swedes, "gave two salutes and demanded the surrender of the fort, as erected on Swedish ground."

The better opinion however, as gathered from the various

writers, seems to be that the surrender was brought about "solely upon the misrepresentations of Risingh." There is nothing reliable to the contrary of this, unless an alleged statement of Bikker himself, be accepted as true. This under the circumstances, however, could hardly be expected. Bikker's statement as it has come down to us, is,—that while the officers and garrison of the fort, were wondering and consulting as to what should be done, Captain Swenso and his 20 to 30 men, with their swords partially drawn, entered the fort. "I welcomed them as friends," says Bikker, "and asked them for a parley. But my soldiers were immediately chased out of the fort, and their goods taken in possession, as likewise my property,—and I could hardly by entreaty, bring it so far to bear, that I, with my wife and children, were not likewise shut out almost naked." Other accounts, of hardly a credible character, suggest,—"That the soldiers of the fort seemed to be acting in concert with the enemy,"—that they were all engaged "in revelry and carousal,"—that the Dutch were enjoying themselves in eating and "drinking to hilarious intoxication,"—including Von Poffenburg and Bikker, "until such time as Risingh and his soldiers saw fit" to take advantage of their condition, and expel them and take formal possession, in the name of Queen Christina of Sweden. It seems quite clear from the best authorities, that Risingh throughout it all, represented himself to be acting by the authority of the Dutch West India Company.

A very short time before this, the Swedish Ambassadors at the Hague, were informed by the State's General of Holland and the Directors of the Dutch West India Company, that they had not authorized the erection of the fort on Swedish territory. Risingh's knowledge of this enabled

him to originate and successfully carry out his fraudulent scheme. When the surrender however was completed, he at once announced his real authority, and offered inducements to the people to accept the Queen as their Sovereign. Many of them accepted and took the prescribed oath of allegiance, which he personally administered to them. He then placed his friend Swen Schute (or Skyte) in command of the fort and went to Fort Christina, taking with him (as prisoners) Von Poffenburg and several of the garrison, whom he feared if left at large might transmit the intelligence of the surrender to the authorities at New Amsterdam. He well knew the belligerent and head-strong character of Stuyvesant, and dreaded his vengeance should he be apprised of the true state of affairs. But he "reckoned without his host". It is said that one Dirk Schniler, a good-for-nothing, bright sort of a fellow of the Dutch garrison, "having seen and heard all that went on, stole away from the fort unseen by the Swedes." He made his way at once, and as best he could, to New Amsterdam, his native place. From the accounts given of his journey, he met with many trials and difficulties; but after many days of travel through swamps, woods and other obstructions, he arrived at his destination. He sought and found Governor Stuyvesant, and gave him a detailed account of all that had occurred. The taking of Fort Casimir by the Swedes, was accomplished on "Trinity" Sunday, and in their reverence for the day, they signalled their victory by naming the fort, "Trefalldigheets Fort," or "Fort Trinity." Even at that time, when presumably at its best, the fort was weak for the purposes of defense, but was admirably well located. Risingh fully realizing the condition of affairs, at once began to thoroughly







repair and strengthen it. This work was done under the personal supervision of Peter Lindstroem, an expert engineer of that day. Risingh was jubilant for awhile, but his joy was soon turned to sorrow. The intrepid and bold Stuyvesant had heard it all, and had communicated with the authorities at Holland, to either contradict or sustain the representations of Risingh. The following year (although Risingh had ceased to be in authority at the fort), Stuyvesant received intelligence from Holland, exposing the fraud perpetrated by Risingh, and emphatically directing the entire "expulsion of the Swedes from the South River." The Dutch West India Company also severely and publicly denounced Bikker, and his surrender of the fort was declared to be an "infamous surrender." Stuyvesant was also ordered, "to exert every nerve to revenge that injury, not only by restoring affairs to their former situation, but by driving the Swedes from every side of the river, as they did with us." In obedience to these orders, in the month of August (near the middle) 1655, Stuyvesant organized and equipped a fleet of vessels and set sail for Fort Casimir, or Fort Trinity, as it was then called by the Swedes. This flotilla consisted (as variously estimated) of from five to seven armed vessels and transports, containing from 500 to 700 men. Risingh in some way was informed of their sailing. Presumably by friendly Indians. He at once reenforced the fort and laid in additional ammunition. Swen Schute being in command was ordered to resist any attack the Dutch might make, "but if the Dutch came peaceably as friends he was to so meet them and amicably adjust their difference."

They then awaited the arrival of the enemy with fear and apprehension. Early in September, Stuyvesant with his

fleet and his "New Netherland Volunteers," appeared a little north of Fort Trinity. They then landed without any opposition whatever. Not a gun was fired on either side. He first cut off as far as he was able to do so, all communication with Fort Christina, and then directed his attention towards capturing Fort Casimir. He at first sent an envoy of peace to Swen Schute, and requested a conference with him. This was granted. The conference however was very brief. Stuyvesant made demand for the immediate and unconditional surrender of the fort. "The villagers were not to be molested." If this demand was not promptly acceded to, "the Fort and village would be fired upon at once." Schute felt his inability to cope with such a force, and rather than see the destruction that would follow his refusal, ignominiously surrendered and delivered to Stuyvesant, the fort and all its property, "to be taken and held by him as the property and possessions of the Dutch West India Company,"—of which Stuyvesant was a director. Both victor and vanquished entered the fort together in good humor. A sermon was preached by Dominie, Megapolensis of the New Amsterdam church. This is said to have been the first sermon ever preached in New Castle. But however this may be, Stuyvesant wrote to the City Fathers, "with our imperfect thanksgiving, as God's hand and blessing was remarkably visible with us, as well in the weather and prosperous success, as in the discouragement of our enemy." There also appears in the Albany Records the following report from Stuyvesant to the Council, sent from Fort Casimir under date of September 12, 1655,—“Last Sunday a week ago to-day after the sermon we took our departure,” (from New Amsterdam) “next day about 3 O. C. p. m.

we arrived off of the bay of South River, a calm and unfavorable tide delayed our running up to it. The following day we came to anchor before the place,—the Swedish Fort Elsburg," (at the mouth of Salem Creek) "then we mustered and divided our little force into five sections. On Friday in the morning we weighed anchor, wind and tide being favorable, passed about 8 or 9 o'clock Fort Casimir without show of hostility on either side and cast anchor about a patereros shot distant from the above mentioned Fort. We landed our troops instantly and sent Capt. Lent Smith with a drummer to demand restitution of our property. The factor Elswick came from Fort Christina next day and asked in a friendly way, the cause of our coming, 'to obtain and maintain our possessions,' we answered."

These two, seem to constitute all the official reports of record made by Stuyvesant, of the re-capture by him of Fort Casimir. Schute's conduct in thus surrendering the fort, was severely criticised and condemned by Risingh, when he heard it the next day, as he was on his way to the fort with reenforcements. But he was too late. All further efforts on the part of Risingh to regain his lost possessions were fruitless. The factor Elswick was threatened with arrest as a spy, but finally allowed to go in peace, and bear to his master the intelligence, "that the Swedes had no right to any part of the country," and that they would not be acknowledged in any way, except upon the condition that they would take the oath of allegiance. All who refused to do so should, "leave and return to their own country." The Swedish garrison at Fort Trinity, was small. About two-thirds of them took "the required oath," to the "High and Mighty Lords and Patroons of the New Netherland

Province." These were granted the privilege of remaining as "freemen" on the South River. Of those who lived in the town outside of the Fort, no oath of allegiance was required or demanded. Without a murmur they all acquiesced in the change of government.

Harsh and angry words continued to be exchanged between Risingh and Stuyvesant. Military preparations went on upon both sides. Lieut. Hook was sent over to Fort Casimir to imparl. He no sooner arrived, than he was arrested as a spy and imprisoned. Throughout all of this "war of words," as bitter as it appeared to be, Risingh never seemed at all to think or even to suspect that Stuyvesant intended going beyond the possessions he obtained through his treaty with Printz. He thought that under any circumstances, he (Stuyvesant) would confine himself to the territory south of the Christina creek. But in this he was mistaken. Stuyvesant's intentions extended much further. He intended in accordance with his secret instructions, "to drive the Swedes from the country." Therefore, instead of waiting for any offensive action on the part of Risingh, he marched over with his men to Fort Christina, and after "a seige of fourteen days, and the firing of but a single gun," the Swedes surrendered. The Dutch entered and the Swedes marched out. With this event, New Sweden (or New Swedenland as it was then alternately called) on the Delaware, permanently came to an end. The historian, Bancroft, in commenting upon these events says,— "Such was the end of New Sweden, the colony that connects our country with Gustavus Adolphus, and the nations that dwell on the Gulf of Bothnia. It maintained its distinct existence for a little more than seventeen years, and

succeeded in establishing permanent plantations on the Delaware."

The new and extended Dutch colony was then called the "South River Colony," and it was placed under the superintendence of Mynheer, William Beekman, as Lieutenant Governor, under the control of the principal or superior government of New Amsterdam.

"Fort Christina," was changed to "Fort Altona," "Fort Trinity" resumed its original name of "Fort Casimir," and the settlement adjoining it was called "New Amstel,"—after a stream of water or river which flowed through Amsterdam in Holland. The word "Amsterdam" signifying "a dam or dyke of the Amstel" river.

With the passing away of the Swedes, Fort Casimir began to be neglected and to go into ruin. It was used occasionally as a public store house, for religious worship, for dispensing of justice and other public purposes. But its usefulness and availability for defensive purposes had ceased.

In the Albany records there are a few references to it, in its expiring years. In a document dated at New Amstel, March 30, 1658, J. Alrich writes to Stuyvesant as to some of its needs, "a store and building in the fort, because they have not yet begun to trade in beavers."

March 13, 1658, and the following day, "Preacher Mellins preached and held thanksgiving services in the Fort." March 15, 1658, Stuyvesant reports they "were not in a good condition on South river, much fraud, smuggling, crime and larceny."

September 4, 1659, Stuyvesant reports, "Every-thing in the city's Colony on the Delaware in a deplorable state."

October 1, 1659, "Fort Amstel had become very dirty and



it was ordered to be cleaned out, which was done immediately."

December 30, 1659, William Beekman wrote Stuyvesant, "Jacob Alrich died and it caused a great altercation in the colony. Most of the colony went to Manhattas instead of Virginia."

Under English rule, on "December 6, 1669, Court held at the Fort in New Castle upon the Delaware river for the tryall of the Long Finne &c. about the late insurrection."

This Court was held under a commission of Sir Francis Lovelace, Esquire, Governor General of His Royal Highness, the Duke of York.

Marcus Jacobsen, called the "Long Finne," was the ring-leader of a rebellion against the English authority. He was arrested, tried, convicted and branded with the letter "R," (the insignia of a rebel) and sold as a slave and sent to Barbadoes. All the other insurrectionists were punished by fine and forfeiture of their goods.

So it was, as is herein written, that Fort Casimir was built by the Dutch in 1651, and ended in decay and ruin under the English in 1671.

The present city of New Castle thus begun, soon spread in size and increased in population. It was first incorporated on May 17, 1672, by the name of a Balywick, governed by a Bailly and six assistants.

Much of the early and interesting history of this great country of ours, centres around this ancient place on the shores of the Delaware River. But the rise and fall of Fort Casimir being the sole scope and purpose of this writing, other matters of perhaps equal interest, must be deferred to some future day.



Believing his pleasant yet onerous task measurably well performed, the writer will conclude by quoting the closing lines of Washington Irving, as written in his humorous, yet truthful work, with which all readers are, or should be familiar, "Notes from the History of New York, by Diedrich Knickerbocker."

"Before I conclude," says Mr. Irving, "let me point out a solemn warning, furnished in the subtle chain of events by which the capture of Fort Casimir has produced the present convulsions of the Globe. By the treacherous surprisal of Fort Casimir then, did the crafty Swedes enjoy a transient triumph, but drew upon their heads the vengeance of Peter Stuyvesant, who wrested all New Sweden from their hands. By the conquest of New Sweden Peter Stuyvesant aroused the claims of Lord Baltimore, who appealed to the cabinet of Great Britain, who subdued the whole province of New Netherland. By this achievement the whole extent of North America from Nova Scotia to the the Floridas was rendered one entire independency upon the British Crown. But mark the consequence, the hitherto scathed colonies being thus consolidated and having no rival colonies to check, or keep them in awe, waxed great and powerful, and finally becoming too strong for the mother country, were enabled to shake off this bond, and by a glorious revolution became an independent empire. But the chain of events stopped not here, the successful revolution in America produced the sanguinary revolution in France, which produced the puissant Bonaparte, who produced the French Revolution, which has thrown the whole world in confusion. Thus have these great powers been successfully punished for their ill-starred conquests, and

thus, as I asserted, have all the present convulsions, revolutions and disasters that overwhelm mankind, originated in the capture of Little Fort Casimir, as recorded in this eventful history."

## APPENDIX.

Should the authenticity of the facts stated in this paper be questioned, the critic is referred to the following authorities:

The Public Records of New Castle County.

The Statutes of Delaware.

The Albany Records (N. Y.), Vol. XII; B. Fernow.

History of New York; Roberts.

Knickerbocker's New York; Irving.

Scharf's History of Delaware.

Ferris' Early Settlements, etc.

Life and Correspondence of George Read; Read.

Watson's Annals of Philadelphia, etc.

The Making of Pennsylvania; Sydney George Fisher.

The Thirteen Colonies; Smith.

A History of New Sweden; Acrelius.

Annals of the Swedes on the Delaware; Clay.

History of the United States; Bancroft.

History of the United States; Alex. H. Stephens.

History of Immanuel Church; Holcomb.

Province of New Sweden; Thomas Campanius Holms.

Duke of York's Record, (Dover); Printed by State in 1903.











